



SIDMOUTH TOWN COUNCIL

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22 september 2026

To: All Members of the Environment Committee:
Councillors: Ian Barlow, Bernie Davis, Paul Dodds, Mike Goodman, Stuart Hughes, Chris Lockyear,
Kevin Walker, Hilary Nelson, Edward Willis Fleming

For Information:
Other Members of the Council
Town Clerk

Dear Sir/Madam,

Meeting of the Environment Committee Monday 28 September at 6.30pm

You are called upon to attend the above meeting to be held at the Council Chamber, Woolcombe House, Woolcombe Lane, Sidmouth. It is proposed that the matters set out on the agenda below will be considered at the meeting and resolution or resolutions passed as the Council considers appropriate.

Members of the public are welcome to attend and speak at this meeting. The Chair of the Committee has the right and discretion to control questions to avoid disruption, repetition and to make best use of the meeting time. Individual contributions will be limited to a maximum period of three minutes.

Yours faithfully,

Christopher E Holland
Town Clerk

A G E N D A

		<u>Page/s</u>
	<u>PART 'A'</u>	
1	Apologies To receive any apologies for absence.	
2	Minutes To confirm the minutes of the meeting of the Environment Committee meeting held on Monday 15 June 2026.	4 - 5

3	Declarations of Interest	<u>Page/s</u>
	To receive any Members' declarations of interest in respect of items on the agenda. Note: You must also declare the nature of any personal or prejudicial interest in an item whenever it becomes apparent that you have an interest in the business being considered.	
4	Matters of Urgency and Report	
	To consider any items that in the opinion of the Chair should be dealt with as matters of urgency because of special circumstances. (Note: such circumstances need to be recorded in the minutes)	
5	Exclusion of the Public	
	To agree any items to be dealt with after the public (including the press) have been excluded. There are no items which the Town Clerk recommends should be dealt with in this way.	
6	Items to note	
6.1	To receive Red, Amber, Green (RAG) reports from the Environment Community Groups:	
	a) Food Forest	6
	b) Sid Valley Biodiversity Group	7-8
	c) River Sid Catchment Group	9
7	Items for Action/Funding	
7.1	Climate Awareness Partnership Sidmouth (CAPS) - To consider a request from CAPS for a £200 contribution from the Environment Committee budget towards publicity and venue hire for forthcoming community projects and workshops.	10-11
7.2	Batiquick water quality testing - To receive an update on local water quality testing and consider linking the results to the Town Council website and whether to support additional testing at Sidmouth Beach by the Lifeboat Station.	
7.3	To receive an update from Councillor Paul Dodds on the Pothole Repair Project and to consider authorising expenditure for the purchase of six signs and up to 15 traffic cones, should funding for the signage not be provided by Devon County Council Highways.	12-14
7.4	To welcome Paul Stevens, Emergency Planning Officer at East Devon District Council, and Chris Khan, Flood Risk Engagement Officer, and to receive a briefing from the Environment Agency on flood risk and community resilience.	
7.5	To consider a report on Alma Field and the options for its future care and management.	15-19
7.6	To consider the feasibility of creating a wildlife pond within Woolcombe House garden and any appropriate next steps.	20-22

- 7.7 To discuss the most appropriate way to produce a clear aerial map identifying green corridors within Sidmouth, particularly those requiring protection, for consideration as part of the Neighbourhood Plan.

Forthcoming Council and Committee meetings:

5 October: Council

6 October: Youth Provision

12 October: Council (Pre budget)

SIDMOUTH TOWN COUNCIL
Minutes of Sidmouth Town Council's
Environment Committee held in the Council Chamber,
Woolcombe House, Woolcombe Lane, Sidmouth
on Monday 15 June 2026 at 6.30pm

Councillors: Ian Barlow (Chair)
Bernie Davis
Mike Goodman
Stuart Hughes (Vice Chair)
Chris Lockyear
Hillary Nelson
Kevin Walker

Invited Reps: Ed Dolphin (Sidmouth Arboretum)
Brian Gold (CAPS, Vision Group Sidmouth)
Jan Metcalf (River Sid Project)
Peter Rose (SVA Trustee)
Stuart Webster (Friends of the Byes)

Apologies: Cllr Paul Dodds

The meeting started at 6.30pm and finished at 8.00pm

PART 'A'

1 Minutes

The minutes of the Environment Group meeting held on Monday 16 March 2026 were agreed as a true record and signed.

2 Declarations of Interest

Name	Item Number	Type	Action Taken	Details
Cllr Chris Lockyear	All items	Personal	Remained in the Meeting during discussion and voting	Member of Sidmouth Biodiversity Group Trustee of Sidmouth Arboretum
Cllr Ian Barlow	All items	Personal	Remained in the Meeting during discussion and voting	Trustee of Sidmouth Arboretum
Cllr Kevin Walker	All items	Personal	Remained in the Meeting during discussion and voting	Member of the Vision Group Sidmouth

3 **Matters of Urgency and Report.**

None received

4 **Items to note**

The Committee noted the Red, Amber, Green (RAG) reports submitted by the Environmental Community Groups, along with an update from the Arboretum, Friends of the Byes and the River Sid Catchment Group. Jan Metcalf thanked Sidmouth Town Council for the grant the River Sid Catchment Group received and reported they had been awarded £50,000 of funding for the Opening the Sid Project. The Chair and Members expressed their sincere thanks to the volunteer groups for the impressive work undertaken on behalf of the Town.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) it be noted that Devon County Council (DCC) had agreed that, if main roads were closed, potholes could be repaired by the Pothole Repair Team.
- 2) The Chair would liaise with East Devon District Council (EDDC) regarding the issue of getting irrigation water to various areas of The Byes.
- 3) A letter of thanks would be sent to Jeremy Woodward from the Chair of Council for his hard work within the VGS Group.

5 **Items for Action/Funding**

- 5.1 Cllr Kevin Walker speaking as a representative of the Vision Group for Sidmouth (VGS) and Climate Awareness Project Sidmouth (CAPS) requested funding for £200 to cover projects until October.

RESOLVED: that £200 funding be made available for the VGS group, subject to the agreement of the Member for Finance in consultation with the Town Clerk.

- 5.2 The Chair updated Members on the Batiquick quality testing and reported that there had been a year's worth of figures, with all readings showing green. The team were looking at how best to publish these results and this would be discussed at the Tourism, Economy and Culture meeting.

- 5.3 Cllr Bernie Davis gave an update to the Committee on the recent screening of The People's Emergency Briefing. There were some who wanted MPs to endorse it so it could be broadcast on television. There was to be a follow-up meeting on 1 July to discuss the film further. Cllr Davis also announced that she was also setting up a Climate Café at the library and would give further information at the next meeting.

.....
CHAIR OF THE ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

Sidmouth Community Food Forest

Despite the recent dry weather, it has been an active few weeks at the food forest as we welcomed a variety of visitors and groups.

Community Visits & Events

- **Work Experience:** Students from Sidmouth College joined us on site to discover the basics of food forestry while assisting with the maintenance of beds, pathways, and plants.
- **Early Years Activities:** We hosted a local pre-school group for an engaging session filled with storytelling and hands-on activities.
- **Charity Open Day:** Continuing our commitment to local support, we held our second annual Open Day in aid of Sidmouth Hospice. The event successfully raised funds for their essential care services, and we look forward to running it again next year.

Competitions & Fundraising

- **RHS Judging:** For the first time, our site was evaluated as part of the RHS It's Your Neighbourhood competition alongside other local community initiatives. Featuring perennial food crops and rich biodiversity accessible 24/7, our space offered a distinct and complementary element to the overall judging.
- **Book Sale & Donations:** During our latest volunteer session, we organised a sale of gardening, wildlife, and biodiversity books. Proceeds are helping us purchase new plants and bulbs for our newly expanded forest garden area. We aim to make this book sale a regular feature, so donations of suitable books are always welcome.

Sid Valley Biodiversity Group

Since the last time the committee met our last we have continued with our normal activities which have included regular guided walks, citizen science activities etc. including encouraging cooperation between local environmental partners. Of specific note are the following:

- **Community Nature Reserve Project:** We are currently working on a community nature reserve idea which is based on the work of Thornbury Council in Gloucestershire. The idea being to encourage people to register their home “nature reserves”, that may range from a window box of pollinator friendly plants or a mini-meadow; bird, bat and hedgehog boxes; the wildlife that are resident or visiting their patch etc. These will be recorded on a registration form, mapped to a postcode (not addresses so as to protect privacy) and will help to identify what we have, wildlife corridors and where assistance is needed. Longer term there is the possibility of courses or other help along the lines of the ID events and training/awareness sessions we have previously run. The launch will include talks and publication of the registration form (a rough draft of one side is shown below).
- **Sid Valley Green Groups:** We recently organised and led the third meeting of local environmental organisations where the focus is on refining joint ventures, synchronising volunteer efforts, and exchanging ecological findings. We were pleased to invite Cllr Barlow to attend what is proving to be a forum where local groups are working together more effectively than in the past.
- **Green Groups Calendar:** The green groups calendar is now active, ensuring that community gatherings, practical work sessions, and public events are all visible to the public in one place.. The [calendar](#) is hosted on the SVBG website and has received hundreds of visits from local people. One of the functions built into the software used is that users can get it to send them reminders of specific events on a one off or regular basis.
- **Edible Valley Project:** Prompted by both the loss of biodiversity and Strait of Hormuz blockade that is destabilising food security we have commenced work on a project to encourage growing more edible crops that also support biodiversity in various ways. It is based on the world renown Todmorden project that has seen public areas as well as gardens planted with edibles for community use. Examples of this already exist in the valley and include the Byes Community Orchard, the Food Forest, various fruit tree plantings such as at Stowe and Higher Brook Meadow plus an increasing number of areas around the town where individual fruit trees have been planted on public land. Extensive details can be found about the proposed project and negotiations have commenced with EDDC about new areas to be planted where residents support the concept. To date the project is not seeking local funding and part of the ethos is to be self supporting where possible.

There are further details on our website at <https://sidvalleybiodiversity.org/the-edible-valley-initiative-a-blueprint-for-resilience-in-the-sid-valley/>

Red: We are requesting the committee's endorsement for the Edible Valley project.

WELCOME TO THE SID VALLEY COMMUNITY NATURE RESERVE!

*Every garden. Every window box.
Every patch of green makes a difference.*

Together, we can turn hundreds of individual green spaces into one connected landscape for wildlife.

WHAT IS THE COMMUNITY NATURE RESERVE?

The Sid Valley Community Nature Reserve is a valley-wide initiative bringing together residents, local groups, and organisations to turn our individual green spaces into a connected haven for local wildlife.

Nature doesn't recognise property boundaries. When gardens are isolated, wildlife gets trapped, but when we join them up, we create vital wildlife corridors. This is what our Community Nature Reserve will achieve. Think of your space as an essential stepping stone—whether you have a sprawling garden, a humble allotment, a courtyard, or even a single window box, every square metre helps creatures like hedgehogs, songbirds, and pollinators move safely across the valley to feed, mate, and shelter.

CONNECTING THE VALLEY FOR WILDLIFE

WOODLAND GARDEN HEDGE POND ALLOTMENT MEADOW RIVER

Nature doesn't recognise our property boundaries. By connecting our gardens, allotments, courtyards and green spaces, we create wildlife corridors where creatures can feed, shelter, breed and move safely.

WHY GET INVOLVED?

MAKE A REAL IMPACT

Every tree, pond, bug hotel and patch of long grass helps strengthen our valley-wide wildlife corridors and aids local nature recovery.

WATCH IT GROW

See our Community Nature Reserve develop as more local spaces join the interactive map.

LEARN & GROW

Discover simple ways to make your garden, allotment or outdoor space better for wildlife.

CONNECT WITH NEIGHBOURS

Share ideas, wildlife sightings, photographs and tips with people across the Sid Valley.

YOU DON'T NEED A BIG GARDEN

WINDOW BOX

Buzzing with bees? You're in!

HEDGEHOG HOLE

Linking two gardens? You're in!

COMMUNITY SPACE

Managing a green space? Register it!

STARTING OUT

Not gardening for wildlife yet? That's fine!

EVERY SQUARE METRE COUNTS.

READY TO JOIN?

It's free. It's easy. And it starts with your patch of green.

1 REGISTER ONLINE

Scan the QR code to register your green space in just a few minutes.

sidvalleybiodiversity.org/sid-valley-community-nature-reserve/

2 REGISTER ON PAPER

Fill in the registration form on the other side of this leaflet and return it to us.

JOIN THE CONVERSATION

Connect with other wildlife lovers across the Sid Valley, share photos of your garden visitors, and ask questions!

Facebook Group:
Sid Valley Community Nature Reserve

facebook.com/groups/2529790844109949/

News from the River

Red: Running costs for website, insurance, stationary not funded.

Riverfly numbers are down within the catchment, leading to one trigger breach, and an expected decline in fish numbers next year.

Polluted Streams:

Cotmaton Stream source unknown – includes episodic very high bacterial loads discharging onto the beach.

Woolbrook - in addition to our own monitoring data [water quality, riverfy and limited bacterial assessment] SWW MST [Microbial Source Tracking] data suggests that the overwhelming contribution to the Sid and tributaries is ruminant bacteria **with the exception of the Woolbrook here human faecal bacteria are the major source** - our data appear to indicate that the source is above SWW's CSOs.

Amber: position of dedicated WRT Project Officer for the Sid is being sought, funded by Rupert Keeley.

Habitat and hydrological surveys and reports on SVA land at Gilchrist and Richard Eley's land to be undertaken by WRT this autumn. [SWW Nature Recovery Fund].

Green:

Roly Poly weir modification completed by WRT, opened by Ian Barlow.

Electrofishing at eleven sites complete

Riverfly training completed with another training session planned.

Water blitz complete [we hope - at time of writing 2 days prior to blitz weekend some of the team have not received their kits].

Regular monthly WRT CSI monitoring on going.

WRT's 10 yrs. of data, including ours, now open access.

SWW nature Recovery Fund received.

Japanese Knotweed removal training funded by SWW to commence.

DCC locality Grant received and being spent on the recruitment of volunteers.

CAPS Report for STC Environment Com meeting 28th Sept.



Key Partners include



Sidmouth Town Council



Vision Group Sidmouth

CAPS = Climate Awareness Partnership Sidmouth

Our **objectives** are to raise awareness of the contribution that individuals and groups acting together locally can make to reduce the negative impact of the climate crisis on our community, future generations and the natural world.

We **aim** to do this by providing accessible information on how to:-

- take practical steps reduce individual carbon footprints,
- encourage & demonstrate sustainable behaviours,
- provide pointers to sources of support than can enable households to live more sustainably whilst reducing their costs without damaging the wider environment.
- become more aware of our impact on wider eco system and the actions been taken locally to address this.
- acknowledge and support psychological and emotional responses to climate change

The impact of these activities can be measured through levels of **engagement** demonstrated by participation in activities, attendance at talks and events, requests for further information. CAPS works closely in partnership with other groups and organisations.

Examples of how this has been achieved since our last meeting in June include:-



Working with Sidmouth Churches Together to host the nationally distributed **People's Emergency Briefing film Sidmouth Parish Church** followed by facilitated community discussion. This screening was facilitated by Professor Brian Golding and attended by 120+ people, including our MP Richard Foord, plus some County, District and Town councillors.

The film has subsequently been shown at Tipton St John, Ottery St Mary, Seaton and Honiton. It will also be show again in Sidmouth on **Thursday 15th October 2pm at St Francis Church.**

The petition that accompanies the film asking for a government backed televised briefing, has now received over 120,000 signatures which means that it will be discussed in Parliament. At the film showing over 60 new members signed up for the CAPS mailings and 20 of these attended a follow up meeting on Wednesday 1st July at 6.30pm in Sidmouth Library to come up with an action plan for future activities. Most continue to be involved with CAPS or its partners locally

CAPS Report for STC Environment Com meeting 28th Sept.

 Supported by DCC & EDDC.  	One of these, Sudi Saimbi, who organised the showing at Tipton and is now coordinating the Sidmouth & Ottery area openings for the Devon wide Eco Homes project. Homeowners who have installed a wide range of energy saving initiatives open their homes to visitors and talk honestly about their own experience. This is over the weekend of 3rd/4th October for details see https://www.energysavingdevon.org.uk/open-eco-homes-devon/events/sidmouth-ottery-st-mary-parishes/ This is planned to become an annual event and Ottery TC has been approached as a potential funding partner.
 	Another initiative arising from the PEB follow-up meeting was the creation of a Climate Cafe. In partnership with Sidmouth Library the cafe is designed to create a welcoming space for people to explore their emotions and perspectives about climate change. Climate Cafes are unstructured and focus particularly on emotional connections rather than problem-solving or strategising. These gatherings aim to foster a sense of community and shared understanding, empowering participants to face climate-related challenges with renewed resilience. The Climate café continues to meet on the first Friday of each month with about 15 regular members.
 	In partnership with the Science Festival and the Devonshire Association CAPS will be promoting a talk on 'Sidmouth's Changing Climate' by CAPS chair Professor Brian Golding at the Manor Pavilion Theatre on Friday 9th October 2:30pm.
	The above shows how successful CAPS has been in meeting the challenge to reach out to new audiences. All this has been achieved by creating new partnerships and tapping into new sources of funding and support. Sidmouth Town Council remains our most important partner and your continued support is greatly valued.
	The VGS (Vision Group Sidmouth) has been a key partner in setting up CAPS and many other successful groups. This is now due to be closed in November however the treasurer (Roger) and Mary (Webmaster) have agreed to continue to provide their services for those groups who need them. CAPS will therefore continue to have use of a bank account and web-site.
	There are various projects in the pipeline initiated by new members including more work with local schools and workshops on plant-based meals and making your own your yogurt and other fermentation products. These would benefit from CAPS support with publicity and venue hire. For the 2027 financial year CAPs will apply for a small grant in November. However, until then we are requesting a contribution of £200 from STC Environment funds.

Overview Project Summary

Project: Pothole Poses - Improve the quality of paths, roads and streetscene in Sidmouth

Contact person: Councillor Paul Dodds PMD – Road Warden

Date: 07/09/2026

Going well & Event dates	Total of 630 holes filled in • Highlights this month – Roselands, Holes along footpath in Heydon's Lane, Footpaths in and around Blackmore Gardens, large defects on Newlands Close and Woolbrook Meadows and some in Sidbury leading to tourist sites. • Donation of new Compactor by Sidmouth Resident – worth £400. This addresses the real issue of heavy equipment being lifted, causing injury • New recruits inducted • DCC extensive surface dressing of Fortescue and Alexandra Road encouraging. I've seen are scheduled plans to do Bulverton Road/Station Road to Esplanade.
Challenges	• Fitting 6 road signs, compactor, 6 tubs of instarmac and sufficient cones (at least 10) a challenge. PMD has applied to DCC for ergonomic roads signs. If this is unsuccessful, I will come to STC for funding to purchase. Work on roads has ceased until we get adequate signage.
Help needed	Woolbrook Road, Buckley Road. Greenhead and Burscombe still really poor. • More cases of DCC acknowledging that a road is below the standard they would wish but do not have the funds in place to do the work. Several isolated businesses / dwellings in danger of being cut off by very poor roads. A particular problem in Sidbury. • STC are encouraged to look into a better transport solution that just relying on volunteer cars. Wear and tear, fuel costs, insurance. I would argue for the establishment of a maintenance team as part of LGR with vehicles.

Plan Ahead for 2026

Further repairs on hold until signage purchased. With one exception – The track down to Sidford Tennis Club as this is v low risk.

PMD priority is to focus on footpaths. Looking at edging on Ham.

Chair of Environment committee to confirm how many more interventions we can have with Dare's before winter sets in.

	Large Defect Around Newlands Close – 5 filled in total
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		Woolbrook Meadows – 3 filled in
		Next Project – Lane down to Sidford Tennis Club. Pothole Posse will fill in about 6 holes near start of lane whilst the Tennis Club, Radio club and Viking Junior Club have purchased 11 tons of scalpings to fill in large holes at far end.
		Example of DCC road with serious defects which DCC have said they cannot repair now – This affects 1 house (a home letting business) which is getting adverse publicity about the roads leading to it. It affects Cave estate too. Owner of residence happy to pay for materials if DCC authorise it and Road Warden oversees it. Owner is proceeding through Cllr Bickley.
		Repairs on Church Path (about 25 defects altogether)



Trip Hazard at The Bridge on The Ham. Repair nicely blended in.



11 Holes - Heydon's Lane with new volunteers



Alma Field Management for Biodiversity 2026

The Sid Valley Biodiversity Group has been approached to help manage Alma Field. Before the group can respond, the first step has to be asking the Town Council, as owner, what do you want to achieve?

This document is a personal piece, it is presented to help the Councillors answer that question. It is worth spending 15 minutes reading if you want to make an informed decision.

The SVBG steering group has not had a chance to meet and discuss this issue but they have all seen this document as individuals and support its contents.

Ed Dolphin

A Success Story

From the point of view of the restoration of biodiversity, Alma Field is a developing success of which the Council can be proud. Over the last eight years the meadow management regime of cutting and collecting the sward in the autumn and occasional cutting back of encroaching blackthorn has allowed the wildflower populations to establish and spread, and this has allowed the associated invertebrate populations to increase.

Alma Field was the second best site in Sidmouth for the Big Butterfly Count in 2026, beaten only by the Delderfield Nature Reserve on Peak Hill. Among the butterflies recorded, there was a rare white form of the Clouded Yellow. Our informal surveys have recorded 107 different plant species. We have not surveyed invertebrates properly, particularly the moths and solitary bees of which there are many, but we have recorded 36 invertebrate species incidentally, including 13 different butterflies and day flying moths, plus many crickets and grasshoppers including the splendid Roesel's Bush-cricket.

When compared to the adjacent field which belongs to the National Trust, Alma Field has much greater diversity and abundance of nature.



Our records on iNaturalist

Background

The term meadow flower population needs some explanation because there are so many misconceptions when it comes to the term wildflower meadow. Soil conditions will play a part but there are three main wildflower groups associated with three different aspects of historic agriculture, meadows, pastures and arable.

For as long as we have records, some grassland has been managed to produce animal fodder by allowing grass to grow to be cut in late summer when the seed heads have developed, these are the true meadows.

Over the centuries, populations of other flowering plants fitted into this grassland regime. They tend to be perennial because the ground wasn't ploughed, and to have taller flower spikes that matured to seed early,

this held the flowers above the tall grass to grab the attention of pollinators, and the plants were able to set seed before they were cut with the hay.

There is a clue in some of the names, meadow crane's-bill, meadow-rue, meadow buttercup, meadow vetchling and meadowsweet. This management even has its own specialist grass species such as rough meadow-grass and meadow foxtail. The characteristic meadow plants also have invertebrate species that rely on them. The caterpillars of marbled white, ringlet and meadow brown butterflies rely on the clumps of taller grasses such as cock's-foot, couch and rough meadow-grass for food and shelter.

Usually animals were let onto the meadow briefly after the cut, this is called aftermath grazing. The hay cut would have scattered seeds from the mature flower heads on the ground and the heavier animals would tread seeds into the soil.

Pasture management would have livestock grazing in a regular rotation and the wildflowers associated with this tended to be plants that spread low to the ground to avoid having their seeds eaten. Plants such as the creeping buttercup, bird's-foot trefoil, cowslips, clovers, selfheal and bugle are more at home in a pasture than a meadow.

Arable fields supported completely different wildflower populations, or they did before modern herbicides. As the fields were ploughed regularly, the wildflowers, or weeds in the eyes of the farmer, tend to be annuals which could complete a lifecycle in a single spring and summer. As they had to work quickly attracting insect pollinators, they developed into some of our brightest wildflowers, poppies, cornflowers, corn marigolds and corncockle, again there is a clue in the name.

Many of our wildflower populations and their associated invertebrates are in decline for a number of reasons, but it is the meadow populations that are the highest priority for conservation and that is the population that I would hope the Council will prioritise for Alma Field. This is not rewilding, this is going back to traditional farming practice as best we can.

Myths and misleads



Alma Field 17th June 2019

In 2018, Alma Field was stripped, scarified and sown with a commercial wildflower mix. The result was spectacular including a wonderful display of poppies in the year that marked the centenary of the end of World War One.

The problem is that commercial seed merchants are rarely totally honest about their products. I am sure the Council was sold a meadow mix, but if you take a close look this is marketing rather than botany.

As can be seen in the picture above, the poppy display was depleted in 2019. Also, the predominant yellow flowers in the foreground are corn marigolds. There were also bright blue cornflowers and the purple-magenta corncockle. As explained above, these are arable annuals. They will have set seed but those seeds usually wait for the farmer to disturb the soil with the plough and harrow before they will germinate the following spring.



Alma Field 21st May 2020

Just two years on, the picture from 2020 shows that only the ox-eye daisies and musk mallows, both grassland perennials, have come back. Many of the other flower species are there but dormant in the ground, seeds waiting for the plough to turn them over and the harrow to create a tilth.

We know they are still there because in 2024 the encroaching blackthorn was cut back and these sprang up on the disturbed ground.



Cornflower



Poppy



Corn Marigold

Alma Field 2nd July 2024

If the Council wants to restore the field to its 2018 glory, it will need to be treated as an arable field, ploughed and harrowed every year. This would of course be expensive and make the field inaccessible to the public for several months at a time. Also the heavy machinery might accelerate cliff falls but I will leave it to others to say if that is likely.

That would also mean resetting the process of invertebrate colonisation as the meadow species that have developed in the last eight years would find the new regime inhospitable. Grasshoppers, crickets and many butterflies over winter as pupae and larvae in the soil, ploughing will kill them.

Arable associated species, especially ground invertebrates that can cope with ploughing, will move in eventually, but this is a slow process. There is very little arable farmland near Alma Field to provide a migrating stock and only flying species will make it.

Whichever outcome is chosen, to continue working for a wildflower meadow or return to the more dramatic arable flower displays, the seed merchants again do not give the full story. Meadow and arable wildflowers have a short flowering period, they have to finish setting seed before the harvest is taken. The field looks

fabulous for about six weeks but, by the end of July all you have left is a display of seed heads, whether meadow or arable.



Alma Field July 2022

Delderfield Nature Reserve on Peak Hill is a wildflower meadow managed very successfully by Wild East Devon, including hand cutting with a scythe to replicate the old ways. It is bursting with plant and animal diversity. In early summer it is a floral treat but, as you can see in the pictures below, it looks just the same as Alma Field by the end of August.

Goren Farm visitor prices change in July because even their flower show is more or less over.



Delderfield 2nd August 2026



Alma Field 2nd August 2026

What the pictures don't show clearly is that both fields still have plenty of perennial knapweeds and toadflax in flower and there are still butterflies feeding, whereas other butterfly count sites were returning very low numbers because of the drought.



Toadflax Alma Field 14th September 2026

There is a fundamental contradiction between the understandable desire to have a picturesque site for public enjoyment and a site that abounds with biodiverse nature. The former is the basis for the development of garden plants but also associated with the reduction in our natural populations and biodiversity.

Conclusion

As landowner and custodian of Alma Field while it still exists, the Town Council has two choices, the intended end destination, and how to get there. Do you want a picturesque park or a thriving nature site? If the former, I am not able to help, if the latter then I am sure the SVBG can offer some support. However, the main function of the Sid Valley Biodiversity Group is promoting public engagement with and understanding of nature and I doubt if they will be able to take on the management.

If you want to provide a home for nature and a vital stepping stone for interconnectivity, which type of nature are you going for, pasture, meadow or annual arable populations?

The field is marked as a pasture on the 1840 tithe map and there are pictures showing cattle grazing in John Tindall's 1920s diaries, but that is unlikely to be an option today. Even aftermath grazing is not practicable.

If you want the early summer display of arable annuals you will have to at least scarify the field deeply in early spring every year and this will have a knock on effect on the butterfly pupae and other invertebrates in the soil.

If you are content to continue with the current journey then just carry on arranging for a farmer or other contractor to cut the sward in late August to September and clear away the arisings, the second part of the operation is vital, that is what the flowers and invertebrates have become adapted to work around.

Addendum

The important element missing from the work on Alma Field is signage. There needs to be clear signage at the gate that explains what is going on and what people are looking at. If this is done properly, including prominent illustrations of the more picturesque elements such as butterflies and summer flowers that are not visible for much of the year. I am sure the SVBG can help you with the design.



Sidmouth Town Council wildlife pond plan

Proposal

It is proposed to locate a permanent wildlife pond within the rear grounds of Sidmouth Town Council Office on Woolcombe Lane (see appendix a). The aim is to increase the biodiversity in and around the Byes through creation of additional permanent varied habitat.

Rationale

Ponds are some of the most important wildlife habitats that exist, yet they are also one of the scarcest available. Whilst the Byes is fortunate to have the river Sid, the ecosystem created by it is completely different from that provided by a wildlife pond.

Within the Sid Valley as a whole, there needs to be more wildlife ponds to help make up the diverse habitats required to support biodiversity.

Build Method Statement

1. Work to take place autumn / winter 2026 based on their base wildlife pond build model
2. Removed soil to be redistributed in deficient areas of the byes
3. The pond will have three levels the base at its deepest will be 60cm. A proprietary butyl pond liner will be used for durability.
4. Native wildflowers will be planted around the pond
5. Native pond plants will be planted within the pond

Maintenance

The pond will be maintained by the Friends of the Byes incorporated into their ongoing Byes scheduled activities.

Cost

Plants no cost – provided by Friends of the Byes

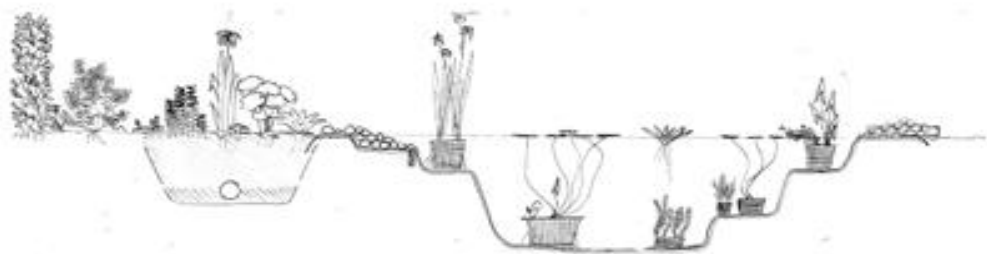
Labour no cost – provided by Friends of the Byes

Liner £450

**Friends of the Byes
2026**



Proposed finished result



Cross section of pond layers

Plan of pond location showing size

